



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20380-0001

IN REPLY REFER TO:

CMC-PA

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WHITE LETTER NO. 13-92

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps
To: All General Officers
All Commanding Officers
All Officers in Charge

Subj: COMMANDERS' RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS MISSION

1. I want all commanders to understand clearly my philosophy and policy regarding the function served by proactive public affairs in today's Marine Corps. As we enter the 21st century facing budgetary and structural reductions, it becomes more important to tell the American public openly and honestly what Marines can do for them as a national defense asset. Moreover, we are a proficient and professional Corps with a good story to share about our programs and achievements. We maximize public awareness of that story three ways: civilian news media, internal command information and an active community relations program that brings Marines face-to-face with the public they serve.

2. Our public affairs philosophy during the Gulf war garnered positive exposure for Marines. That philosophy remains valid: maximum public access to day-to-day operations and special exercises in consonance with operational security and propriety. It is a mistake to assume that the public generally understands what we do. The majority of people have only a vague notion of how we operate and train. The story of our capabilities is not one we can tell only once; it must be told repeatedly in a variety of media to the widest possible audience.

3. Public Affairs Officers are a vital part of the Marine air-ground team. They are the liaison between the public--via the media and community relations organizations--and the Marine Corps. The command public affairs officer must be a participating member of the commander's staff and must have routine direct access to the commander to be able to respond to issues quickly and accurately with clear and concise guidance from the top.

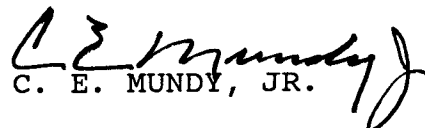
4. While we strive to accentuate positive information to the public, we must never sacrifice the truth simply because it may prove embarrassing or negative to the Corps. Bad news gets worse with time. If an attempt is made to mask the truth, the masking itself becomes a story, and the original bad news eventually comes out anyway--but worse! It is better to tackle tough issues promptly and truthfully within legal, operational and proprietary bounds. The wisdom of this approach, and the destructive results of the opposite, have been validated repeatedly. While we can't

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always expect favorable reporting, we should expect fair, balanced reporting. The best way to maximize fairness on the media's part is to be fair with them.

5. Commanders must set the example in the total public affairs effort. If your Marines see you talking to the public, either in a public forum or via the media, or participating in community activities, they will follow your lead. Your goals in this arena should include creating an informed public, maximizing opportunities for interaction among Marines and their surrounding community through innovative and aggressive community relations efforts, and, equally as important, supporting an honest program of internal information that makes our Marines, families, and civilian employees as informed as their counterparts outside the Marine Corps Family.

6. The PAO and his staff are the command's means for accomplishing these goals. Take a proactive approach to issues that, in the hands of the media or in the eye of the public, have potential to bring credit or discredit to your command. Tackle the perceived problem areas and plan how to handle them ahead of time, before they become issues. Effective use of the public affairs team in assessing issues and preparing information programs will ensure continued public understanding and support--essential elements in the continued vitality of our Corps.


C. E. MUNDY, JR.